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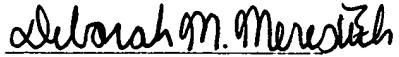
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PATENT
IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant: Valente et al. Examiner: Chevalier, A.
Serial No. 09/214,971 Group Art Unit: 1772
Filed: January 15, 1999 Docket No. 58009-011900
Title: METHOD FOR PRODUCING A COMPOSITE MATERIAL AND
MATERIAL OBTAINED BY MEANS OF SAID METHOD

I hereby certify that this correspondence and identified enclosures are being deposited with the United States Postal Service, first class mail, postage prepaid, under 37 C.F.R. 1.10 on the date indicated, and is addressed to: Commissioner for Patents, Box: Non-Fee Amendment Washington, D.C. 20231 on December 18, 2002

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Deborah M. Meredith

DECLARATION OF GABRIELE VALENTE

Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

I, Gabriele Valente, hereby declare as follows:

1. I am an inventor in respect of the present application. I have personal knowledge of the facts set forth in this declaration and can testify competently to those facts.

2. I am a specialized technician, and I am one of the inventors of the composite material and use thereof which is the subject of the present application. Before and in 1996 I desired to find or develop a leather product which would meet a commercial need of consumers.

3. The composite material obtained according to the method disclosed in my patent application is constituted by a substrate backing material in form of sheet or roll, made of reconstructed leather skin or natural leather skin. The substrate backing material is covered by a protecting layer of polyethylene (PE). Also the upper surface of the coupled material can be

embossed to achieve a higher surface resistance, e.g. to scraping or abrasion, as well as other important aesthetically relevant advantages. The coupling operation is carried out simultaneously with the embossing operation.

4. Already at this early stage of the product development, the product resulting from this method has shown a commercial success. This commercial success is directly related to the excellent properties and the low cost resulted from reconstructed leather or natural leather covered by a layer of polyethylene. This is an important feature of the claims of the application.

5. The counterpart patent that has already been granted in Europe and in Russia. I have signed some valuable and important license agreements for the technology of the patent application. In particular an agreement with Mr. Audisio, a known entrepreneur at a national level, who has been active in the business of leather and reconstructed leather for more than forty years. As a result of this agreement, I have the potential economic advantage of at least \$ 1.500.000 per annum for the life of the patent. Moreover, additional trade agreements with important Italian brands of the fashion are currently under discussion for the production of bags, shoes and other typical leather articles using the composite material according to my invention.

6. Prior to my invention, no effective means had been developed for producing a material having a PE layer placed on a piece of natural leather, to simply have a new product with the same appearance as the original starting material.

7. According to my invention, old and worn leather pieces are reconstructed as reconstructed leather, and a PE layer is placed on the reconstructed sheet. Through the embossing operation, this leather product looks as good as new and natural skin. The result is really surprising, since one has the impression to have a piece of new natural leather skin in your hands. Furthermore, by adding the PE layer directly on the surface of the backing substrate leather or reconstructed leather material some different, and much higher, mechanical properties were surprisingly obtained. This had never been done before my invention.

8. I do not advertise my product which are the subject of this patent application and I never started to market the same in full. Nevertheless just through the contacts that I had during my normal business activity I have succeeded to market my invented leather and reconstructed leather product to several manufacturers of leather and related products for harvesting important feedbacks on the request as well as on the stability of such a new product. In the last 3 years I have contracts for supplying my invented product of about \$ 25.000 per annum. The fundamental interest in the invented product that has already been expressed by potential customers proves the need of such a simple but effective material in the sector.

9. The composite material made of reconstructed leather material or natural leather and PE is highly competitive and has the potentiality to gain a primary position in the market. Most of its competitive products comprise at least three superimposed layers causing higher costs of production and a more sensitive industrial process. Furthermore the use of polyethylene has much more limited environmental impact in comparison with all the other synthetic components normally present on the marketed products such as polyurethane foams or PVC. This aspect is even more important in connection to the fact that also the backing material derives from recycled or old natural leather.

10. Prior to the present invention the leather market was unable to produce a reconstructed leather product with as good an appearance as natural leather. The prior art reconstructed leather product (uncoated) normally looks like a poor material, just as a second hand cloth or a rag composite as compared to a tuxedo of fine finished fabric. Additional tests have shown that if PE coating is provided with a leather scent, it is almost impossible to distinguish the reconstructed leather with the PE coating of the invention from a natural leather sheet with a coating.

11. Accordingly, the commercial success of the claimed invention is directly related to the advantages provided by the claimed subject matter, and is not due to any other extraneous factors.

12. In addition to the U.S. Patent filing and the EP and Russian granted patent, counterpart patent applications are pending in Japan, Italy, Czech Republic, China, Brazil,

Australia, and Turkey. These are all countries where there is a significant leather business or industry. Patents are still pending in these countries.

I further declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that willful false statements or the like may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issuing thereon.



Gabriele Valente

December 18, 2002

Date